

CPYRIGHT

CPYRIGHT

FOIAb3b

CPYRIGHT

CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, April 12—President Johnson presumably gets the latest interpretative lowdown on developments in the South Viet Nam political crisis from four principal sources.

Not necessarily in order, these sources would be Defense Secretary McNamara, Secretary of State Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy and our ambassador

in Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge.

As LBJ is a great hand at getting information to supplement what his chief advisers have to say, it is likely that during the present crisis he has picked the brains of others whose judgment he values. These would include Gen. Maxwell Taylor, the new White House adviser, Walt Whitman Rostow, Undersec-



Thich Tri Quang
A "bad guy"



Thich Tam Chau
A "good guy"

retary of State George Ball and Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.). Some of these individuals have had a few things to say publicly about the confused situation in the last few days.

We are thinking specifically of a Bundy TV interview, a statement made in Conyers, Ga., Saturday by Sen. Russell and a Sunday TV interview by Undersecretary Ball.

If what they said openly is what they told the President privately, then Johnson's dilemma concerning what to do or not to do in the explosive political situation must be almost unbearable.

Bundy Separates Them as Goodies and Baddies

Bundy, for example, separated the Buddhist leaders into "good guys" and "bad guys." The chief bad guy was Thich Tri Quang, one of the chief conspirators against the military junta headed by Gen. Ky. A leading good guy was the moderate Buddhist monk Thich Tam Chau.

The net result of this Washington effort to show that a Buddhist split indicated the crisis was not really too serious, was that both the good and bad guys displayed immediately their unity in the anti-government drive.

Bundy was not alone as a wrong guesser. The State Department itself considered his words of wisdom so significant that the Bundy

text was distributed in a clear effort to show that the higher echelon of the department—namely Secretary Rusk—agreed with everything his subordinate had said.

What Sen. Russell, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on Saturday was another instance of the kind of widely varying advice the President has been receiving in the last few weeks. Some of his advisers have definitely urged that the Administration acknowledge it has prime interest in a stable Saigon government.

On that basis it is argued that pressures, military if necessary, should be applied to keep a strong military junta in power, with or without Gen. Ky.

Should Leave if Not Welcome, He Says

But Russell took the position that we were powerless to act in the government crisis, and if a new government should come

power an "agonizing reappraisal" of our commitment would be required. He added, "If it becomes clearly evident that a majority of the Viet Namese do not want our help, I would favor withdrawing immediately both military forces and economic aid."

This brings us up to Sunday when Undersecretary Ball spoke his piece on nationwide TV. What was happening in Viet Nam was "a normal kind of unrest" in his opinion.

"I would not regard this as anything that needs to be deplored," Ball went on, "so long as it doesn't interfere with the conduct of military operations."

Within 24 hours of Ball's calm estimate of the situation the Pentagon reported that the political disturbances have hurt military operations and specifically had caused a temporary bomb shortage at our Da Nang air base.

We can only hope the President has been getting sound estimates of the situation from other sources. We are not privy to what Lodge is reporting but we cannot forget how wrong his "readings" were on Jan. 30, 1964, during his first tour of duty as ambassador in Saigon.

That was the day when a surprise military coup, organized by Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh ousted the government of Maj. Gen. Duong Vin Minh (Big Minh).

Spent the Morning 'Teaching English'

The last cable from Lodge that day to the State Department was to the effect that he had been spending the morning "teaching Big Minh to make a speech in English." There was positively no advance tip of a possible coup from the Embassy.

Ever since John F. Kennedy, with then Vice President Johnson urging, began our military buildup in late 1961 there has been a dismal record of wrong guesses by officials claiming to be experts on Viet Nam. The chief culprit of course was Defense Secretary McNamara who talked about how our boys could be brought home by 1963, for everything then would be nicely settled.

The chief wrong guessers in the present crisis are still to be ferreted out. Perhaps some day the President will reveal who sold him on the idea that Gen. Ky's military junta could be stabilized as an efficient government for many years ahead, provided LBJ gave Ky his firm backing, which he did at the Honolulu conference.

And perhaps we will later be able to find out who sold the Administration on the idea that Ky should be encouraged to cement his power by ousting a "bad guy" from the junta, Gen. Nguyen Khanh Thi. It was this ouster which brought the crisis and now is official Washington the belief is that Thi was all along a "good guy," incorruptible, not corruptible.

CPYRIGHT